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Gliddon mummy-case



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THE

GLIDDON MUMMY-CASE

IN THE

MUSEUM OF THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION.

BY

CHARLES PICKERING, M.D.

WASHINGTON CITY:

PUBLISHED BY THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION.

1869.

SMITHSONIAN CONTRIBUTIONS TO KNOWLEDGE.

208

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[ACCEPTED FOR PUBLICATION, JUNE, 1867.]

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1879, Nov. 18.
Vickering Request.

INTRODUCTION.

THE following article has been prepared at the request of the Institution by Dr. Pickering, in illustration of an interesting specimen of ancient Egyptian Archæology, which was presented by Mr. Gliddon in 1842 to the National Institute of Washington, and at the dissolution of this society in 1857, came by its charter under the charge of the Smithsonian Institution.

The cover of the Mummy-Case, obtained by Mr. Gliddon, was sawed by him into three parts, one of which was presented to the National Institute, another to the Naval Lyceum of Brooklyn, and the third to Mrs. Ward, of New York. Diligent inquiry for the two last-mentioned portions has been made, in order to have them also examined and figured, but without success, and attention is now called to the fact in hope that if the other portions are still in existence, the fact may be communicated to the Smithsonian Institution.

The accompanying plate represents the cover of the Mummy-Case as if perfectly flat. It is, however, curved at each side, although the upper surface is nearly plane except at the edges.

JOSEPH HENRY,
Secretary, S. I.

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION,
July, 1st, 1867.

ON THE
GLIDDON MUMMY-CASE
IN THE
MUSEUM OF THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION.

BY
CHARLES PICKERING, M. D.

IN conversation, some fourteen years ago, the late Mr. Gliddon informed me that he procured this mummy-case at Sacara, from an Arab who having dug it up was committing it to the flames; that the portion saved contained no king's name to fix the date, and was sawed by him on arriving in America into three pieces, one of which he deposited in Washington.

This Washington fragment (the only one I have seen) is represented in the annexed colored engraving; and on examination before and after visiting Egypt, appeared to me, to belong to an early period; conviction gradually strengthening, that it is one of the oldest, if not the oldest specimen of hieroglyphic writing known.

The earliest writing of ascertained date, is under Snophru of the Third dynasty, builder of the great stone pyramid at Dashur, and supposed to be Sephouris, who reigned from B. C. 3110 to 3080: the style of writing under Snophru is the same as under the Fourth dynasty during the building of the pyramids at Gizeh.

On the Gliddon mummy-case, and the Abusir tomb (now in Berlin), the writing is in a different and clearly anterior style. Towards the beginning of the Third dynasty, Tosorthos or Sesorthos, reigning from B. C. 3240 to 3211, in the words of Manetho *γραφης επεμεληθη*, improved the writing: as all improvements in writing have tended in one direction to increased facility, the mummy-case at least seems to have preceded such an interference.

Sesorthos also inaugurated building with hewn or squared stone: Manetho's statement referring perhaps to larger constructions as pyramids, and not precluding knowledge of the art; the Abusir tomb is in fact of squared stone.

Metallic implements are required for squaring stone, and the *crucible* on the mummy-case indicates smelted copper: but the *stone adze* is also figured, as appears from the mode of fastening, though the material of the blade may remain uncertain; the character is changed in form throughout subsequent hieroglyphic writing, and clearly represents a metallic adze.

This stone adze of the Gliddon mummy-case, and the hieroglyphic character possibly of the stone celt or hatchet continuing as late as the Fifth dynasty (Leps.

June, 1867.

(1)

Denk. ii, pl. 64), are all the traces I have been able to detect of a Stone age in Egypt. The implements belong to the period when writing was invented, and instead of being used in Egypt, may have been traditional forms derived from the parent country eastward.

The *throne* on the mummy-case, narrow and straight-backed, seems also to belong to the commencement of the art of writing; and may indicate nothing beyond the rule of a chief, or the Bedouin form of government.¹

The twice-curved *throwing-club* of the mummy-case is figured also on the Abusir tomb, and occasionally in the hand of Egyptians as late as the Seventeenth dynasty (Leps. Denk. ii, pl. 3, and iii, pl. 5 and 9). The pattern is clearly Mesopotamian: a similar throwing-club is in the hand of the Asiatic strangers at Benihassan, in the sixth year of Sesostri, B. C. 2121; and is the only kind figured on the Assyrian monuments.

By an exception among the birds, the plumage of the falcon remains uncolored, the real object represented (as suggested to me by Mr. Birch in London) being a *banner* or standard: a sense of nationality is implied, with military organization, and foreign wars.

The two appendages of the perch are distinctly feathers, and imply the art of *falconry*: an art to the present day found by Layard among the Bedouins along the Euphrates.

A more Southern country is indicated by the *kneading-trough*; the checkered workmanship being the same as in the shallow baskets to the present day brought down the Nile, and ascertained by myself to be manufactured at the southern extreme of Arabia.

The *flag-shaped fan* has a narrower flap than at the present day; in those observed by myself at the first cataract of the Nile, and made around Mocha in Southern Arabia, of strips of leaves of the doum-palm, *Hyphæne crinita*.²

¹ Even Arab writers speak of a period when Greece was uninhabited; and notwithstanding recent discoveries, there is yet room for doubt, whether in the days of the Egyptian king Snophru there was a human being in Europe.

Seti Mienptah ruled Egypt from B. C. 1396 to 1366, and his tomb at Thebes contains the hieroglyphic sign of a northern animal, the *beaver*; also the earliest figures of northern people, possibly Europeans, having egret-plumes on the head, and wearing an ox-hide bordered and banded with swan's down; there are no traces of woven cloth.

The Stone-age relics of Switzerland and Northern Europe have not disclosed a state of society anterior to cultivating flax and weaving cloth: these countries were certainly inhabited when *amber* first reached the Mediterranean. Under Crotopus, who reigned in Greece from B. C. 1290 to 1269, Phaethon's sisters were transformed into poplars, whose tears along the Rhine became amber; the public being thus far enlightened respecting the amber trade.

The extension of population and of civilization are two different things: the mummy-case contrasting with the condition of France during more than eight hundred years, rejecting civilization from the Greek settlement of Rhodon on the Rhone under Rhodian rule of the sea (B. C. 918 to 895) to the intense barbarism witnessed in B. C. 87, by Posidonius.

² A point yet farther south is indicated by the crested bird of hieroglyphic writing; occurring throughout, either entire or the head and neck only, but shown by the outline figure on the Abusir tomb (Leps. Denk. ii, pl. 5) to be the *Ibis cristata* of Madagascar. In the present state of our knowledge, the fact seems inexplicable.

The *oblique-handled staff* figured, continues in use to the present day; and one picked up by myself on the pilgrim trail in passing Suez, was recognized at Mocha as of the pattern belonging exclusively to Western Arabia.

The small bird, from the form and plumage, is distinctly the *house-sparrow*, *Fringilla domestica*: its thick bill continues on the Abusir tomb, but subsequent representations are no longer recognizable. In conformity also, the Coptic vocabulary gives "jaj" sparrow, "jajë" enemy; a meaning implied by the sparrow seeking the owl's protection and finding oppression (Horap. ii, 48), also by the depredations of the sparrow on grain-crops.

The owl, from the form and plumage, is distinctly the *barn owl*, *Strix flammea*: the outline on the Abusir tomb corresponds, but representations throughout subsequent hieroglyphic writing are no longer recognizable.

From the color of the bill and feet, the *chick* is clearly the young of the red-legged partridge, *Perdix Græca*: a fact that in the absence of the Gliddon mummy-case, might not have been ascertained.¹

The asp or *cobra* is shown by the coloring to be the indigenous Egyptian species, *C. haje*; and the fillet around the body seems to imply the art of *serpent-charming*. According to Horapollo, i, 59, the bee signifies a people obedient to their king; but the Coptic vocabulary gives "ga" people or nation, "ga" under, "ëgrëi" beneath, "agori" asp or basilisk. The connection in Hindustan of the cobra with mythology, seems therefore a later idea, borrowed from the West.

In the absence from the mummy-case of all emblems of idolatry, the solitary eye is not human, but the *all-seeing eye*: the Coptic vocabulary gives "ai" to be, to exist.

The pitcher or *spondist*, for pouring out libations, is also figured; and the *ointment-vase*.

The *house* clearly belongs to the origin of writing: and the seat of this invention is shown by the flat roof to be in a rainless climate not north of Egypt: the addition of an arched window implies building material either of mud hardening in the sun, or regularly-formed mud-bricks. An arch at this early date conflicts with much that has been said in print; and the dwelling is in every way superior to those of Modern Egypt, observed by myself to be mere conical mud huts without any window.

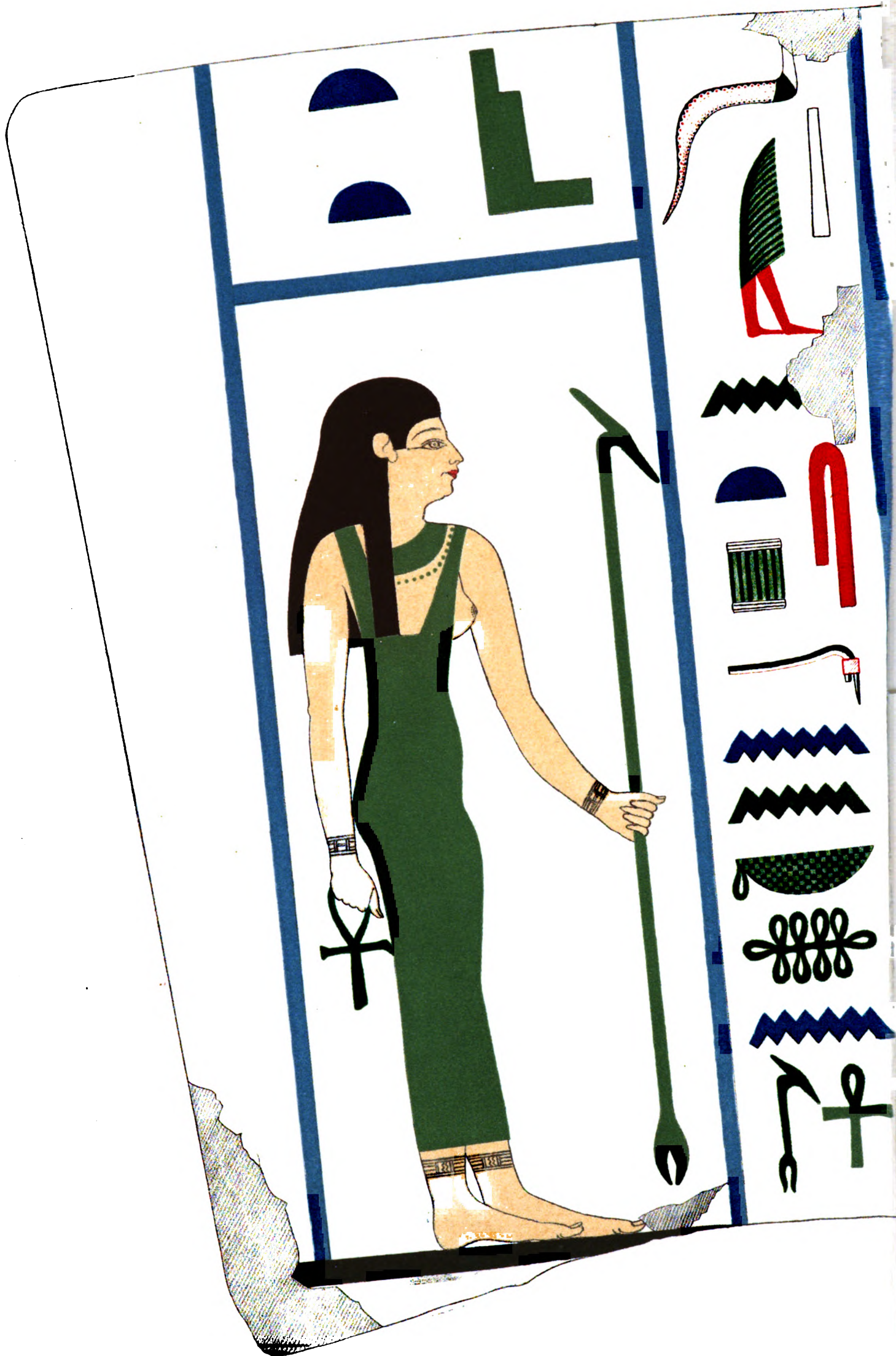
The *arched window* occurs besides detached in the hieroglyphic writing, and is a frequent character subsequently, known to signify the feminine: in the mind of soldiers away from home, a cottage-window might bring up the image of some one behind; and the Coptic vocabulary gives "thimë" village, "thimë" woman, wife. Beyond Egypt and hieroglyphic writing, the arched window turned on end became an early, if not the earliest form of the Greek theta or th soft; westward denotes in Latin a cognate sound; and to the present day is retained in most European languages as the capital letter **D**.

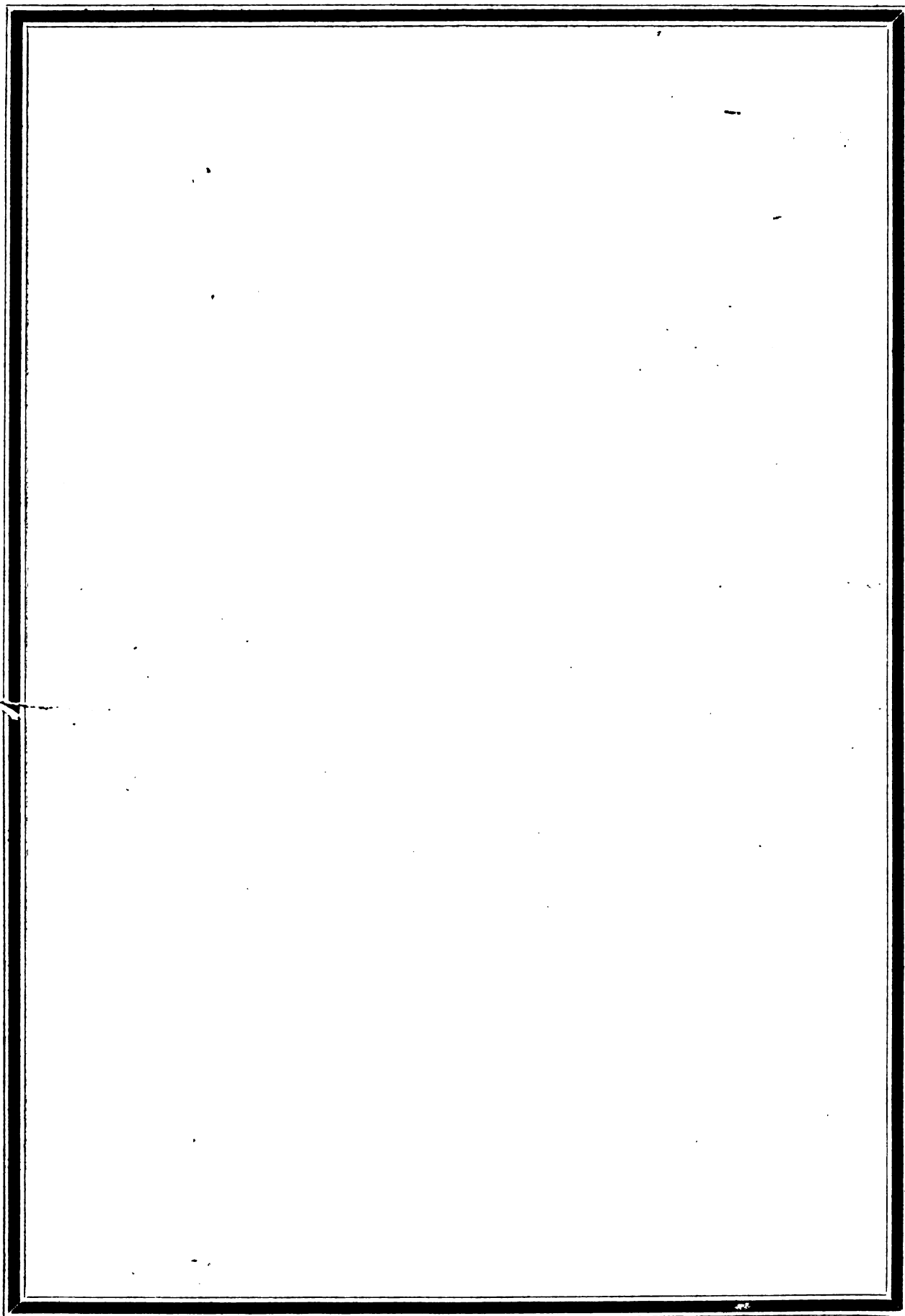
The Egyptians themselves, as figured on the mummy-case, though the yellow

¹ As late as king Snophru, hieroglyphic writing presents a distinct figure of the *eagle* (Leps. Denk. ii, pl. 2): subsequent representations are no longer recognizable.

complexion may prove conventional, are clearly from the hair and features of the Arabian or White Race.

In regard to the material, the mummy-case is formed of layers of *linen* ; over which is a thin coating of *chunam* to receive the paintings. This firm, smooth plaster or stucco continues in use both in Egypt and Hindustan throughout monumental history ; and to the present day is applied around the Indian Ocean to a great variety of purposes, including sheathing ships. I found sea-water employed in the manufacture of *chunam* by the Arabs at Zanzibar.





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